

Amendments to the Claims:

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

Listing of Claims:

Claims 1-8. (Canceled).

Claim 9. (Previously Presented) An apparatus for automatically fixing sutures used in the surgical replacement of a heart valve, comprising:

a first cylinder having a first end and a second end and an interior surface and an exterior surface;

first securing means formed on said exterior surface adjacent to said second end of said first cylinder;

a second cylinder having second securing means formed on an interior surface of said second cylinder, such that said second securing means corresponds to and is adapted to fixedly engage said first securing means, wherein said first securing means and said second securing means are adapted to secure fixing sutures therebetween; and

a guiding rod including a rod end piece formed at a first end of said rod, said rod end piece having a plurality of support brackets extending from said rod end piece and a guiding ring affixed to said support brackets, said ring being adapted to engage said second end of said first cylinder, wherein said interior surface of said second cylinder slidingly engages an exterior surface of each of said support brackets;

a securing member including a rod sleeve which slidably engages said guiding rod, and a sleeve end piece formed on a first end of said rod sleeve, said sleeve end piece having plurality of securing brackets, which are adapted to engage said second cylinder and which are positioned to interfit with said support brackets; and

means for sliding said securing member on said guiding rod, whereby said second securing means of said second cylinder are urged into engagement with said first securing means on said first cylinder.

Claim 10. (Previously Presented) The apparatus of claim 9, wherein said means for sliding comprises a handle, said handle affixed to a second end of said guiding rod and including a grip having a levered projection, such that when said grip is pressed against said handle, said levered projection contacts said securing member and urges said securing member toward said rod end piece.

Claim 11. (Original) The apparatus of claim 9, wherein at least one eyelet is formed on each of said supporting brackets for receiving at least one suture, whereby said guiding ring is guided into contact with said second end of said first cylinder.

Claims 12-15. (Canceled)

Claim 16. (Previously Presented) An apparatus for automatically fixing sutures used in the surgical replacement of a heart valve, comprising:

a first cylinder having a first end and a second end and an interior surface and an exterior surface and a valve sleeve including an annular cuff;

wherein said sleeve surrounds said exterior surface adjacent to said first end of said first cylinder, and wherein first securing means are formed on said exterior surface adjacent to said second end of said first cylinder;

a second cylinder having second securing means formed on an interior surface of said second cylinder, such that said second securing means corresponds to and are adapted to fixedly engage said first securing means, wherein said first securing means and said second securing means are adapted to secure fixing sutures therebetween; and

a guiding rod including a rod end piece formed at a first end of said rod, said rod end piece having a plurality of support brackets extending from said rod end piece and a guiding ring affixed to said support brackets, said ring being adapted to engage said second end of said first cylinder, wherein said interior surface of said second cylinder slidably engages an exterior surface of each of said support brackets;

a securing member including a rod sleeve which slidably engages said guiding rod, and a sleeve end piece formed on a first end of said rod sleeve, said sleeve end piece having a plurality of securing brackets, which are adapted to engage said second cylinder and which are positioned to interfit with said support brackets; and

means for sliding said securing member on said guiding rod, whereby said second securing means of said second cylinder are urged into engagement with said first securing means on said first cylinder.

Claim 17. (Previously Presented) The apparatus of claim 16, wherein said means for sliding comprises a handle, said handle affixed to a second end of said guiding rod and including a grip having a levered projection, such that when said grip is pressed against said handle, said levered projection contacts said securing member and urges said securing member toward said rod end piece.

Claim 18. (Previously Presented) The apparatus of claim 16, wherein at least one eyelet is formed on each of said supporting brackets for receiving at least one suture, whereby said guiding ring is guided onto said first cylinder.

Claims 19-21. (Canceled).

Claim 22. (Previously Presented) An apparatus for automatically fixing sutures used in the surgical replacement of a heart valve, comprising:

- a first cylinder having a first end and a second end and an interior surface and an exterior surface;

- a valve sleeve comprising an annular cuff surrounding said exterior surface adjacent to said first end of said first cylinder,

- first securing means formed on said exterior surface adjacent to said second end of said first cylinder;

- a second cylinder having second securing means formed on an interior surface of said second cylinder, such that said second securing means corresponds to and are adapted to fixedly

engage said first securing means, wherein said first securing means and said second securing means are adapted to secure fixing sutures therebetween; and

a guiding rod including a rod end piece formed at a first end of said rod, said rod end piece having a plurality of support brackets extending from said rod end piece and a guiding ring affixed to said support brackets, said ring being adapted to engage said second end of said first cylinder, wherein said interior surface of said second cylinder slidably engages an exterior surface of each of said support brackets;

a securing member including a rod sleeve which slidably engages said guiding rod, and a sleeve end piece formed on a first end of said rod sleeve, said sleeve end piece having a plurality of securing brackets, which are adapted to engage said second cylinder and which are positioned to interfit with said support brackets; and

means for sliding said securing member on said guiding rod, whereby said second securing means of said second cylinder are urged into engagement with said first securing means on said first cylinder.

Claim 23. (Previously Presented) The apparatus of claim 22, wherein said means for sliding comprises a handle, said handle affixed to a second end of said guiding rod and including a grip having a levered projection, such that when said grip is pressed against said handle, said levered projection contacts said securing member and urges said securing member toward said rod end piece.

Claim 24. (Original) The apparatus of claim 22, wherein at least one eyelet is formed on said supporting brackets for receiving at least one suture, whereby said guiding rod is directed to said first cylinder.

Claim 25-43. (Canceled).